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**Massachusetts Agriculture Day at the State House Set for Mar. 28**

BOSTON – Agricultural exhibits and awards, Massachusetts-grown cuisine, and advocacy on behalf of issues crucial to Massachusetts farmers will take center stage at the State House on Wednesday, Mar. 28, when the Bay State celebrates Massachusetts Agriculture Day.

Arriving by the busload from across the state, hundreds of farmers, agricultural industry officials, 4-H members, Future Farmers of America (FFA) members, and students and staff of agricultural high schools are expected to turn out for this annual event. A State House tradition for over 20 years, Massachusetts Agriculture Day recognizes farmers' contributions to the state's economy and culture, while providing an opportunity for farmers to meet with lawmakers to discuss issues and legislation that affect agriculture. Massachusetts' 6,075 farms maintain some 518,500 acres of open space and generate \$416.8 million in annual farm-gate revenue.

"From the cranberry bogs of Cape Cod to maple sugar producers in the Berkshires – and the acres of vegetable and dairy farms, fruit orchards and nursery and greenhouse operations in between, Massachusetts' farms comprise a vibrant and varied community," Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles said. "My office is pleased to work with the agricultural community to sponsor this event devoted to supporting the long-term viability of such an important sector of Massachusetts' business community."

"Agriculture Day provides a great opportunity to our Commonwealth's farmers to present their products, interests and concerns in a very tasteful way," said Department of Agricultural Resources Acting Commissioner Scott Soares. "Importantly, Agriculture Day also offers our State Legislature a unique experience to witness the great diversity of Massachusetts Agriculture in one location."

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Invited speakers at Massachusetts Agriculture Day include Sen. Pam Resor and Rep. Frank Smizik, chairs of the Legislature's Joint Committee on the Environment, Conservation & Agriculture; and Desiree Choquette of Swansea, 2007-2008 State FFA president and a graduate of Bristol County Agricultural High School. Annual Agriculture Day Awards will be given by the Massachusetts Agricultural Promotion Board – a panel representing more than 25 commodity and agricultural organizations that coordinates Agriculture Day with the Dept. of Agricultural Resources' assistance.

Agriculture Day begins with morning meetings between farmers and their state legislators, followed by an 11:30 am speaking program at the Grand Staircase. The "Taste of Massachusetts" – a reception featuring Massachusetts farm and specialty foods, including selections prepared by students of Middleton's North Shore Technical High School - kicks off at 12 noon.

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